Searching for Health Information on the Internet

Intermediate Internet Workshop

National Network of Libraries of Medicine
Pacific Northwest Region
Seattle, WA

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Objectives:

By the end of this class you will be able to:

- choose appropriate tools to search for resources on the Internet

- do a simple MEDLINE search that finds at least one relevant citation

- do a World Wide Web search that finds at least one high-quality resource

- evaluate resources you find on the Web

Advanced Browser Moves

- Organize your bookmarks
- **Find** words on a "page"
- Printing possibilities
- Change your browser starting page
  - http://www.nnlm.nlm.nih.gov/tools.html

The Starting Page You Select ...

Should be:

- Intelligently designed; in good taste
- Well organized and easy to navigate
- In the user's main area of interest
- Authoritative and current

Should have:

- Reviewed links to other topical locations
- Links to search tools

Using the Internet today is like trying to use a library where all the books have been dumped on the floor and the lights turned out. Everything's there, but we need better flashlights (browsers), search time (bandwidth), and room directions (directories) to find it.

A.J. Vendeland, in Review of The Software Publishers Association Europe Conference, Conference Analysis, June 28, 1996

Your Search Strategy Should Be . . .

- Is the Internet likely to have your answer?
- Can you find it from your home page or bookmarks?
- Should you ask on a discussion list?
- Do you need to search the Web?

Web Search Tools

- Subject-specific
  - e.g., MedWeb

- General
  - e.g., Alta Vista

Subject-Specific Search Tools

- Resources compiled are specific topics
- Human judgment used to select sites
- Search completeness depends on web sites chosen by compiler
- Search uses textwords AND also subject hierarchy
- Lessens the chance of totally irrelevant hits

Let's Look at a Subject-Specific Search Tool. . .

General Search Tools

- Sites are chosen by an algorithm, not human judgement
- Search completeness varies widely
- Search uses textwords and/or subject hierarchy
- Many irrelevant hits
- Different tools do not overlap much

Let's Look at a General Search Tool. . .

Hints for Using Search Tools

- Always look for the Help section and **READ IT**!
- Get to know a search tool's capabilities
- The Rule of Threes:
    - Try your search at least three different ways
    - Try it in three different search tools

The Internet - What's Out There?

- Unpredictable resources
- Predictable resources

Unpredictable Information Resources

- An example is the Web itself!
  - chaotic
  - all-inclusive
  - free text
  - unpredictable structure
  - experimental searching
  - wider audience

Predictable Information Resources

- Examples: the phone book, MEDLINE
  - organized
  - selective inclusion
  - uniform vocabulary
  - uniform structure
  - formalized searching
  - narrower audience

What is MEDLINE?

- Premier database covering medicine and health
- Indexes 3,800 journals worldwide, in all languages
- Provides citations to the medical journals from 1966 to the present
- About 75% of the citations have abstracts
- Updated weekly

Free Web Access to MEDLINE

- From the National Library of Medicine
  - IGM (Internet Grateful Med)
  - PubMed
- Many others
  - e.g., Avicenna, HealthGate, Medscape and more

Internet Grateful Med

- Access to MEDLINE, and ten other NLM databases
- Use of MeSH and other lists of medical subject headings
- Ability to limit searches by language, study group, years, age groups, etc.
- Loansome Doc document delivery service

A Look at IGM

Pub Med

- Simple and advanced search interfaces
- A special clinical query form
- Sets of precomputed related articles
- Links to publishers sites for some articles (very few at the present time)

Evaluating What You Find

- Authority
  - Who is the author?
  - What is the author's affiliation?
  - Who is the publisher?

- Objectivity
  - Who is the sponsor of the site?
  - What are the goals and aims of the presenter of the site?

Evaluating What You Find

- Currency
  - When was this produced?
  - Has it been updated?

- Coverage
  - Is it complete for the topic and audience?

- Accuracy
  - Reliable and free from error

Behind a Wall on the Internet

- Password protected
  - Information for a fee
  - Intranets

- Open but needing a special search interface

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